

Nodding off while president spoke

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SHARING a stage with President George Bush is an experience that the Darby family of Durban will never forget.

But after a 40-hour flight, little Emily Darby was so bushwhacked from her travels – and from the excitement of it all – that she curled up on a chair, put her head on her mother's lap and promptly fell asleep.

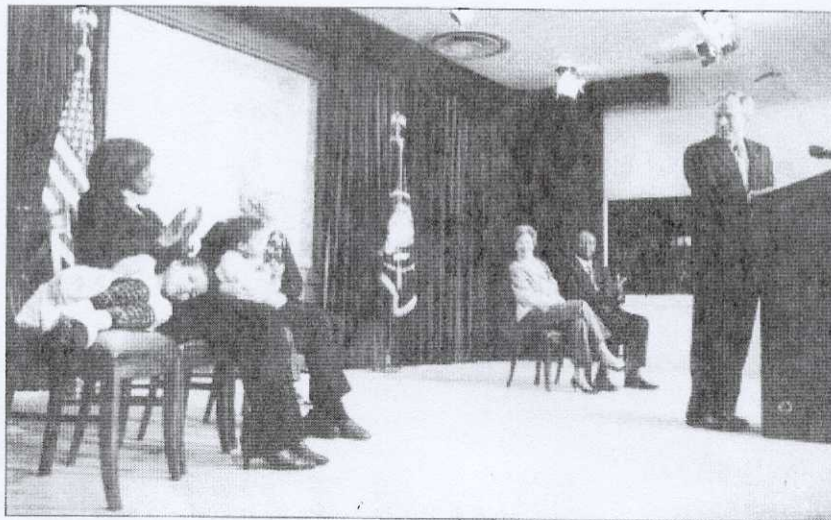
Emily, 5, her mother, Thandazile, 35, and her little brother, Lewis, 4, had been invited to the White House by the president where he praised their determination and courage in surmounting the devastating effects of HIV/Aids.

Emily's nap did not go unnoticed though.

"That's the effect of a long speech," the president joked to his 150-strong audience of senators, congressmen, ambassadors and reporters.

Addressing the World Aids Day ceremony, Bush told his audience that Emily's mother had taken her daughter to hospital two years ago with what she thought was mumps, only to find that Emily – and the rest of the family – were all HIV-positive.

As the anti-retroviral treatment was expensive, Darby had to decide whether to buy medicine or food. It was a difficult choice as they needed to eat so that they could take the pills,



Bushwhacked ... Five-year-old Emily Darby catches up on her sleep after her travels – while President Bush jokes about her nap to his audience. Emily's mom, Thandazile, her brother, Lewis, (4) and the family's doctor, Dr Helga Holst from McCords Hospital, also shared the stage

PICTURE: SUPPLIED

Bush explained.

Now, however, the family is getting all the medication it needs as a result of President Bush's special Emergency Plan for Aids Relief.

They are three of the 1 600 people getting their medication from Durban's McCords Hospital, where 1 600 people are receiving treatment.

More than 40 000 South Africans are currently enrolled in Aids treatment programmes supported by the Emergency Plan fund.

The family made the trip to America with their doctor, Dr Helga Holst, and they were welcomed with "open arms," Darby told a press conference at the Durban Consul General's office yesterday.

Did her children realise

exactly who they were going to see, we asked?

"When we got to JFK airport, Emily told the passport people to hurry up as the Queen had invited us there," laughed her mother.

After the formalities of the World Aids Day ceremony, the family and their doctor had a private audience with the president in the Oval Office and had their photographs taken with him.

"When Lewis started hopping on one foot, the president also began hopping on one foot... He was just like a father, not like a president at all. I was relieved," recalled his mom.

The president gave them special tickets to Washington Zoo to see the baby panda bear, the first born in captivity in the

USA, which the public are not allowed to visit yet. He also invited them to the Christmas Tree lighting ceremony.

And he presented them with bookmarks with a presidential seal and pens which their mother plans to let them have when they go to college.

Darby said she was pleased and lucky to have been chosen to "thank" the president and the American people for financing the medication for her family.

She only found out after her late husband died three years ago that he had been HIV-positive.

Her own family was now finding out about her HIV status. She had never been sick, so no one suspected anything, she said.